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# President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters

## Stand on Nicaragua

Q. Mr. President, have you approved of covert activity to destabilize the present Government of Nicaragua?

A. Well, no, we're supporting them, the — oh, wait a minute, wait a minute, I'm sorry, I was thinking El Salvador, because of the previous, when you said Nicaragua. Here again, this is something upon which with national security interests, I just — I will not comment. But let me say something about all of Central America right now, and questions on that subject. Next week I will be addressing the Organization of American States on that entire subject, and therefore I'll save any answers to any questions on that subject for then.

Q. Mr. President, could you definitely say what the policy is as far as having American covert operations to destabilize any existing government, without specific reference to Nicaragua?

A. Well, again, I'm going to say this is like discussing the options. No comment on this. Yes, George?

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## Secret Strategic Plans

Q. I'm sorry, but I'd like to go back to Latin America and El Salvador. In the 1960's the C.I.A. came up with a secret plan to get us involved in Vietnam in a surreptitious, covert manner. And, is it possible that you can tell us that there is no secret plan now devised by the C.I.A. or any other agency in Government to surreptitiously involve Americans in similar activities in Latin America, and can you also insure the American people that we will not go in there secretly without you and this Government giving us some prewarning?

A. Well, Leslie, you know there's a law by which things of this kind have to be cleared with Congressional committees before anything is done, but again, if I may point to something, I'm not in total agreement with the premise about Vietnam. If I recall correctly, when France gave up Indochina as a colony, the leading nations of the world met in Geneva in regard to helping those colonies become independent nations.

And since North and South Vietnam had been previous to colonization two separate countries, provisions were made that these two countries could by a vote of all their people together decide whether they wanted to be one country or not. And there wasn't anything surreptitious about it, but when Ho Chi Minh refused to participate in such an election and there was provision that the peoples of both countries could cross the border and live in the other country if they wanted to, and when they began leaving by the thousands and thousands from North Vietnam to live in South Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh closed the border and again violated that part of the agreement.

And openly, our country sent military advisers there to help a country which had been a colony have such things as a national security force, an army if you might say, or a military, to defend itself. And they were doing this. I recall correctly, also in civilian clothes, no weapons, until they began being blown up where they lived in walking down the street by people rid-

ing by on bicycles and throwing pipe bombs at them, and then they were permitted to carry sidearms or wear uniforms, but it was totally a program until John F. Kennedy, when these attacks and forays became so great, that John F. Kennedy authorized the sending in of a division of Marines, and that was the first move toward combat moves in Vietnam. So I don't think there's any parallel there between covert activities of anything.

Q. Mr. President, might there not be a secret plan that you will not tell the American people about?

A. I can't answer your question for the same reason I couldn't answer George's — I just can't answer on that. There's a lady in the very back row?

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